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The Somme is still with us



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The INQUIRER

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"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

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Inquiring Words

Idealism perished on the Somme.

— A.J.P. Taylor

Lost stories of incredible loss

The photos started appearing on Twitter and facebook early on 1 July. Men, dressed in World War 1-era soldiers' uniforms, appeared at railway stations, city centres and roadsides all up and down the country. Some were in groups, some on their own. One of them appears on the cover of this issue. They stood, like ghosts,, watching people pass. Some groups sang songs of their regiments, or 1916's popular tunes. But for the most part,

they were silent. Each of them had cards with the name of one soldier who perished on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, which they gave to passers by.

Commissioned by 14-18 NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First World War centenary, and titled 'we're here because we're here' it was conceived and created by Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre. The 1400 volunteer participants were a reminder of the 19,240 men who were killed on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

Each participant represented an individual soldier who was killed on that day. The press release says the work was partly inspired by tales of sightings during and after the First World War by people who believed they had seen a dead loved one – which, to me, made the photo at the top, which was taken that morning in Bangor, Wales, even more poignant. There is a story there, like so many from the Somme, which we will never know.

— MC Burns
14-18 NOW photo



Faith in Words

The annual Christmas issue of worship material, stories and meditations is coming up. Please send in prayers, addresses, meditations, art work, photographs – anything which is an expression of your faith – to *The Inquirer*. We are happy to receive contributions about Christmas, Winter, Solstice – whatever the season means to you.

New contributors are most welcome.

For more information or to submit material, email:

Inquirer@btinternet.com Or, use the editor's postal address at left.

Material is due by 15 November

Addendum

One more addition to the list, which appeared in the 24 September issue, of Unitarian chapels registered to perform same-sex marriages: Newcastle-under-Lyme Unitarians has permission to marry couples in the chapel or in their own home, if required.

Follow **@The__Inquirer** (two underscores) on Twitter. A little shot of Unitarian news and faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>

Countless lives for 10 kilometres



A German prisoner helps British wounded get to a dressing station near Bernafay Wood at the Battle of the Somme. Photo by Ernest Brooks via Wikimedia Commons. Lord Kitchener poster, Library of Congress image. Public Domain

By Daniel Costley

One hundred years ago today, the Battle of the Somme was moving towards its end on 18 November 1916. The rate of deaths fluctuated over its five months, but no day was more deadly than its first on 1 July when 19,240 British soldiers died. Many French and German soldiers died too. The soldiers walked out of their trenches and advanced on German lines. The British generals believed the Germans were completely killed following a massive aerial bombardment from the British lines. More than 1.7 million shells had been fired at the German side. The Generals thought the opposition was wiped out. But it wasn't.

It was a terrible miscalculation.

Most of the 19,240 were mown down by machine-gun fire. Most of those killed were very young, inexperienced men who heeded the call from Lord Kitchener. The famous poster: 'Your Country Needs You'.

Pals marched together to their deaths

These were not particularly well-trained military men. Anyone with an inkling of modern warfare was already in France. These men, the Pals Battalions, groups of friends and professionals from the same workplaces, towns and villages, these men were trained by old soldiers, long out of current service, who knew nothing of the horrors emerging in Northern France.

In these Pals Battalions, young men from the same town volunteered and served together – and died together.

The battle of the Somme went on for 4½ months, eventually claiming some 1 million lives across all sides. The British advance eventually moved the front line around 10 kilometres forward. That's 100,000 men, dead, for each kilometre

achieved.

The first day of the Somme was the worst – a wholesale slaughter of a Volunteer army. These were not professional soldiers, although the other side were. They were not experienced in any form of warfare, let alone the horrors of the trenches.

And they died, in their thousands, on that first day, and every day for months afterwards. What for?

The 20th-century French existentialist philosopher and author Albert Camus put an intriguing spin on death in war. He said: 'There are causes worth dying for, but none worth killing for.'

It's an interesting take on war and on conflict, generally.

At this time when we remember the Somme, it is perhaps helpful to shift focus from the brutality of war to the tragic implications for those involved – and to raise the question of what purpose.

For the 1 million killed at the Somme, there would be an average of four close relatives left behind: parents, partners, children. Four million lives affected. Devastated. Add to that friends, other relations, colleagues and that number grows.

Think particularly about those comrades, brothers in arms. The sacrifice of individuals on all sides in that war, and in that battle, changed the course of history.

There are many historians now who believe that although



(Continued on page 6)



Photo by Nankai via Wikimedia Commons

Two Poppies

At the beginning of November
I bought two poppies.

One, with its blood red petals sharp edged symbols
of pain and death, its thin green drooping leaf and wiry stalk
wound about with flimsy ribbons of dull green plastic,
I pinned into my button hole.

The other flower, soft and white like a velvet star in the sky,
I pinned above my heart, and asked the God of Mercy
to lead us in our search for peace.

Waking to the dawning of the eleventh day
of the eleventh month,

I looked up at a sky where the sun wove
thick reddening clouds into an empyrean landscape
of poppies, mimicking dark fields saturated
with the life blood of men who, like early rotting corn
untimely harvested, lay scattered across the fields of death.
Beneath this wine red canopy, I asked the God of Hope
that he might bring us out of darkness into light.

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day
of the eleventh month

I stood not in a church, nor beside a cenotaph,
but on a bitter cold cliff rising high above the coast of Kent.
There when I listened to the wind I heard the echoing thud of
guns,

there in the rain I felt on my hands warm rivulets of blood,
there, as I remembered them and honoured them,
I wept for all those who died, for every widow who mourned,
and for every sorrowing fatherless child.

Our world today is still wracked with unceasing bloody
slaughter,
and in the name of the Man of Peace I ask the God of Love
that we may some day offer to all our enemies
the gentle white poppy of peace.

Amen So may it be .

— Naomi Linnell

Compassion has its own purpose

The dictionary states: Compassion literally means 'to suffer together'. Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

Compassion is not the same as empathy or altruism, though the concepts are related. While empathy refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, compassion is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help. Altruism, in turn, is the kind, selfless behavior often prompted by feelings of compassion, though one can feel compassion without acting on it, and altruism isn't always motivated by compassion.

Some may dismiss compassion as too touchy-feely and too connected to our emotions. I believe it is our compassion that drives us towards the kind deed. Recently I attended a small symposium consisting of people from different faith groups from Ireland. This was held in Harris Manchester College Oxford. Some in the group gave long exegesis on Scripture and the need to comprehend its meaning. One comment was, 'If I believed as little as you, I could not preach on a Sunday'. I told my own story regarding the Good Samaritan and how I am confronted by that parable all the time as I try endlessly to understand its meaning. I also stated that I was continuously measuring, 'the vagueness of little belief against the good deed'.

That's how I understand compassion: does it take us to the other side of empathy and drive us towards altruism? I believe it does. I am not always comfortable saying, 'Almighty God' because it makes my God sound smug and arrogant. I usually say at the beginning of prayers Compassionate and loving God. I think I use the word compassionate because it is the God part working in me.

While cynics may dismiss compassion as irrational, scientists have started to map the biological basis of compassion, claiming it may have a deep evolutionary purpose. They have actually shown in research that when we feel compassion, our heart rate slows down, we secrete the "bonding hormone" oxytocin, and regions of the brain linked to empathy, caregiving, and even feelings of pleasure light up, which often results in our wanting to approach and care for other people. So may we always pray to our most compassionate and loving God to give us the resolve to do that good deed no matter the vagueness of our belief.

— By the Rev Chris Hudson, minister at All Souls Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, Belfast. He delivered this meditation on compassion at a meeting of the International Association for Religious Freedom held at Croydon Unitarian Church.



The Good Samaritan window at Ely Cathedral. Photo by Olan/Shutterstock.com

The terrors of the Somme are relev



Men of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, their rifles stacked nearby, lying exhausted in the grass in a rear area at the Somme. Photo by Harry Knobel, via Wikimedia Commons

(Continued from page 3)

the gain was only 10 kilometres of land, the Somme changed the way the two sides fought from then on, and drove an earlier and different conclusion to the war.

Perhaps for the better. Perhaps not. We shall never know for certain.

Camus says there are causes worth dying for, but none worth killing for. Yet, in war, this is a simplistic way to view its complexities. The thought of terrified men huddled close together in the muddy, stinking trenches of the Somme and elsewhere. Knowing they must kill or be killed. Placing trust in the Generals. Hoping against hope that there would be a plan, that they would survive. Terrified.

Dying for a better future

This is not really their cause. This is not really their war. Yet they know in their hearts they are there for the benefit of those back home. For the volunteers at the Somme, they followed the call, 'Your Country Needs You'. For all those who have relied on mutual agreements to defend one another. These men did not die in vain. They died because they believed they could make the future better. We remember them. And we must remember their hope for a better world.

It is difficult to reflect on the tragedy of the Somme. But it sometimes helps to know that many, if not all, those who died believed they were fighting to end oppression in Europe. For the British, this wasn't a war for territorial gain. We had no interest in capturing the land for ourselves. It was, instead, a war to end the oppression of others. As Camus put it, it is possible there are causes that are worth dying for.

Unitarian Theologian William Ellery Channing might put a different spin on this, saying: *Without the power of thought, what we call conscientiousness, or a desire to do right, shoots out into illusion, exaggeration, pernicious excess. The most cruel deeds on earth have been perpetrated in the name of conscience. People have hated and murdered one another from a sense of duty. The worst frauds have taken the name*

of 'pious'.

Thought, intelligence, is dignity, and no-one can hope to progress but in proportion as one learns to think clearly and forcibly, or directing the energy of one's mind to the acquisition of truth. Everyone, in whatsoever condition, is to be a student. No matter what other vocation you may have, your chief vocation is to think.

Channing reminds us that, at times, acts carried out in good conscience, acts carried out in the belief they are the right things to do, can still be cruel deeds. Hatred and murder can result from acts carried out with a clear conscience.

I don't place the acts of the Volunteer Force within this conscientiousness of which Channing speaks. The Generals, however? Perhaps.

Channing calls us instead to use our heads when considering an action to take. Don't simply follow the emotion. Just because it *feels* right at the time does not mean it is right.

Channing reminds us that progress will only come when the energy of the mind is directed towards the acquisition of truth. What is the truth behind our emotions? Why do we believe the direction our heart is telling us? Should we follow it? Or should we, as Channing argues we should, use our head too.

A call to reconcile

Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, offers a call to arms for the work of reconciliation. He says:

To reconcile means to bring peace and happiness to members of our family, society, and other nations. This alone will bring about greater understanding. Our society needs those who can bridge the huge gaps of misunderstanding between people of different religions, races, and cultures.

To promote the work of reconciliation, we have to refrain from aligning ourselves with one party or another so that we understand both. This work takes courage. We may be suppressed or even killed by those we wish to help. After listening to both sides, we can tell each side about the suffering of the other.

n how we choose to live our lives

This is where we start to learn of our potential to make the world a better place. A way in which we might elevate ourselves above the heart-felt throng and, with care and deliberation, bring the sense of spirit and calm to the two or more sides of an argument. Or a debate. Or a referendum. Or even a war.

We do, of course, have our opinions, our views, our heartfelt conscience-led actions. Yet these are surely only half of the equation. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, it is also the work of the spiritual to find the path of reconciliation when the going gets tough. To put aside our heartfelt side-taking and, instead, to find a way to bring both sides together.

This is, I suggest, precisely where William Ellery Channing was taking us too. To follow our thinking, to discern the best approach to an issue, to a problem, to a matter of conscience. When thought is added to heart-felt action, we would all, I hope expect to follow the more peaceful path.

Lessons still to learn

For us all, as spiritual seekers, there is perhaps a lesson to be learned from all of these places and thoughts.

The lessons of the dreadful Battle of the Somme have not, in all ways, been learned and acted upon. The tragic escalation and unthinking rush to battle proved to be one of the most bloody moments in modern warfare. On the 100th anniversary of the battle, we must surely seek to reflect on how we might have progressed.

Thich Nhat Hanh encourages us to dig deep within ourselves. To override the emotion and passion that might lead us to take sides when, at that point, reconciliation is the path that our thoughtful contemplation might lead.

This is not to say we shouldn't have debate, opinion,

decision; that we should not take a stance against evil, against intolerance, against xenophobia, against hate. We must, of course, do those things. That is how we might bring the equal love of God into the world. Through our actions.

Yet our actions must not lead to greater conflict. To drive a stake into the oneness of humanity is to cause division and encourage hatred. Our actions must be tempered by love. Our words must be couched in terms that attempt to bring harmony, or change through consensus. It will not always be easy. But it is surely the aim we might take.

We still need reconciliation

St Paul, in his letter to the new church in Corinth, got it about right. He spoke of the need to live our lives in love, and of the patient endurance that real love needs to be. He says:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

If we are to make anything positive from the terrors of the Somme, and, more relevant today, if we are to better understand the way in which we might reconcile friends, neighbours, strangers and colleagues after the referendum on Europe. Then it is with the living of love in the world. Of following our heads and our hearts to discern the truly loving response to the dangers we face.

May we live our lives in love. And may we bring hope to the world.

The Rev Daniel Costley is minister to the Kent Unitarian congregations in Tenterden, Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Dover and Chatham.



British stretcher bearers recovering a wounded soldier from a captured German trench during the battle of Thiepval Ridge, September, 1916. Photo by Ernest Brooks via Wikimedia Commons

Historic England recognises chapel

By MC Burns

Newington Green Unitarian Church has been placed on a list of at-risk heritage sites by Historic England. The designation could bring grants and expertise to the New Unity congregation, which has plans to refurbish the building and create a centre for, 'exploring and celebrating the history and modern relevance of rational dissent and the foundations of feminism,' according to a church plan.

'For our Newington Green chapel to be designated as a heritage at-risk site confirms ... things of which we were already aware,' said John Bates, chair of the New Unity board of trustees. 'It is a place of extraordinary and inspiring heritage from its place at the heart of pre-eminent dissenting community, through support for revolutionary wars in America and France, through the birth of Feminism with Mary Wollstonecraft, to the fight for Marriage Equality in our own century.'

The Newington Green Chapel, which dates to 1708, is run in a partnership with Unity Unitarians (Islington) known as New Unity.

'New Unity is a strong congregation and has gone from strength to strength over recent years,' said John. 'After merging Newington Green and Unity Unitarians (Islington), to become, New Unity, a congregation with two buildings to use for our programmes, social justice work, worship, and rental activities.'

The Newington building has been Grade II-listed since 1953 and, according to Historic England has 'problems with leaking roofs, dampness at low levels, and structural movement'. The building came to Historic England's attention when an inspection of the chapel was done last year for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant application made by the congregation.

'This designation confirms that the great heritage associated with New Unity's Newington Green chapel will be lost to future generations if decisive action is not taken soon,' said John. 'The cost is far too large for New Unity to manage on its own. We are in the process of preparing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid that we hope will ensure access to this remarkable heritage for centuries to come – and to allow New Unity to continue to add new chapters to that great story of freedom



Newington Green Chapel, with a street art painting by 'Stewy' of Mary Wollstonecraft visible on its side. Photo by Carbon Caryatid via Wikimedia Commons

and justice.'

Specifically, the congregation plans to restore the church and the schoolrooms which were added in 1860, then open it as 'a living centre for exploring and celebrating the history and modern relevance of rational dissent and the foundations of feminism, values that are central to our congregation's mission,' said John.

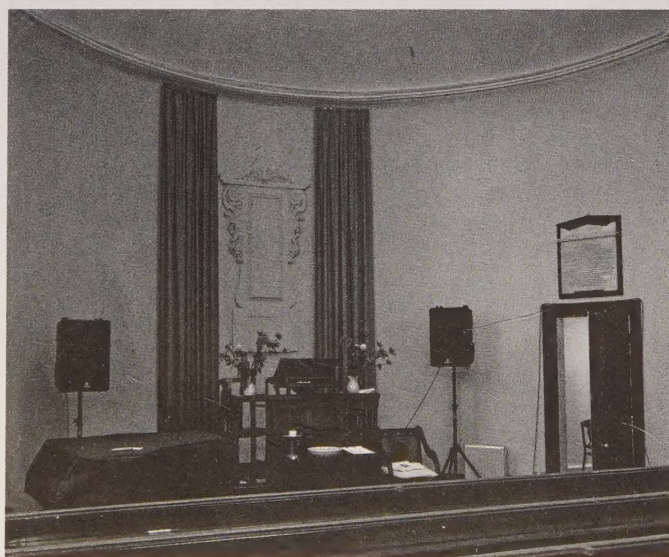
Newington Green's historic members and visitors are a big part of its heritage. According to a New Unity overview, 'The church was built on the site of Morton's dissenting academy in 1708 and is one of the first congregations to identify itself as 'Unitarian'. Some remarkable things went on in the church, and in the Minister's house across the green, which is still there. With a little literary licence, we could say that the American Revolution was practically plotted in our pews.

'That, of course, is thanks to our most famous or notorious minister, Rev Dr Richard Price (1723-1791). Quite apart from his political radicalism, articulating civil rights when that was a dangerous thing to do, and supporting the American and the French Revolutions, he made some significant advances in numerical studies: actuarial science depends on his discoveries. It might sound boring, until you need to buy life assurance, and then you'll be glad it's got some foundation in honest calculations.

'So you can imagine who was sitting in the chapel then: in one pew, the spies of the day, the king's men, sent to listen for any sedition in the sermon; and in the next pew, the emissaries of the chancellor, eager for words of financial wisdom. Rev Dr Price was quite the man. His memorial is on the west wall of the chapel today.

'There have been some notable people who came to hear him, at the pulpit or at the dinner table: Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, John and Abigail Adams, Joseph Priestley, and many others. The person Price most influenced is arguably Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, hence the banner on our railings, proclaiming us the birthplace of feminism.'

MC Burns is editor of *The Inquirer*.



Interior of Newington Green Church. Photo by Jonathan Cardy via Wikimedia Commons

Humour is a gift free as falling conkers

I recently chatted with a friend who recounted tales from her childhood. She told me how so much of her view of her life had changed in recent times and how so many of her memories were now so joy filled. She spoke of growing up in Ireland and after a while she recounted a tale about going conkering and how conkers became currency among her friends.

As I listened, images of my own childhood came back to me. Memories of Sunday afternoons and going down to Briar Wood with my grandma and brother and sister and hunting for conkers and being totally immersed in the activity. After the harvest we would then take them back to the farm and try to select the best ones and create the champion conker. We tried all the different techniques we'd heard about to create the conker that would beat the one of legend that someone at school had, 'Someone said they had a "hundreder", someone said they had a "thousander".'

When I look back at it, the whole process was a mindfulness practise, as we all became totally absorbed in what we did. It was also a lot of fun.

We were absorbed in the thrill and anticipation as we walked down to Briar Woods. We told tales about the woods and how they came to be, and all the mythology about the place. There were history lessons too and lessons about biology, geography, mythology and a little theology. The whole enterprise was hope filled: This time we were going to find and create the champion conker. We gathered the conkers and became increasingly connected to the process, filling our bags as we picked them from the ground and throwing up sticks to reach the ones that had not yet fallen. There was the thrill and connection and conversation as we walked back up the hill, listening and telling stories and dreaming of that champion conker. We would empty our bags onto my grandma's kitchen worktop and she would add the ones she had lovingly spent time collecting all week. She told how she and some friends made a trip to Harrogate to collect conkers for their grandchildren – such loving activity.

We then tried all the different techniques to create the champion conker – again discussing all the myth and mystery in it. Then came the hardest bit, skewering them and putting a strong shoelace through. I wonder how many potential champions I ruined in my attempts to get the skewers through. Eventually, with a little bit of help, I managed to get a few decent ones.

Then it would be Monday morning and I thrilled to the buzz of conversations in the playground as we became absorbed in our stories about our conkers. Then battle would commence. Yes there was a little pain when we missed and rapped one another on the knuckles. We would shorten the string for more accuracy but meant less power. This would go on for weeks, it seemed, until someone became champion – well at least for one year. I never became champion, but by golly I never felt happier and never felt more connected to the world in which I lived and the people I shared my life with. Just beautiful memories of a playful and spiritually enriching and connecting time.

Playfulness and joyfulness are essential elements of a deep and meaningful life. Sometimes this is an aspect of spiritual

From nothing to Everything by Danny Crosby



life which can easily get lost as we take it and ourselves too seriously. God, though, surely wants us to be happy, joyous and free and not live life glumly, as if it were a vale of tears. Yes there is suffering present in life, and there is a time for everything under the sun. One of which is play.

Play is vital. It doesn't have to be physical either, the best kind of play can be found in conversation or sometimes just the look someone can give. We must play, though, if we are to live a fulfilling spiritual life. It is playfulness that sets us free and enables us to use our natural creativity.

Playfulness often leads to laughter. Laughter is not only the best medicine it can also lead us to deeper truths about ourselves and the mysteries of life. Every spiritual tradition has its Holy Fool. Every Sunday, during worship, I share at least one story from our human canon, often there is great humour and playfulness within them, but there is also a serious message that the humour helps to deliver.

Humour is so vital; it helps us to connect spiritually and to therefore live fully and healthily. To be in good humour means to be in good health. Linguistically humour has its roots in the 'old' French word 'humor', derived from the Latin 'umere'. Physicians of medieval times believed that we had four different types of internal fluids that they called 'humors' and it was these that determined our physical and mental health. Therefore if a person became ill it was believed that their humors were out of balance. I do so love etymology; language has had such a fascinating journey and an amusing one at that.

So to be in good humour literally means to be in good health. This is why playfulness and humour is so vital to a healthy spiritual life. Humour is best enjoyed in the company of others who want to really let go. It is so easy to get caught up in the seriousness of life and to worry about what might be, or to live with regret of what has been in the past. This is not healthy you know and I don't think it helps us or anyone else. Sometimes we need to let go and have some serious fun, to be childlike once again, so that we are then better equipped to live with the serious issues of life.

So I invite you this autumn to bring alive both within yourselves and one another a festival of great laughter, to bring some joy to our world and to have a little fun. I invite you to remember that life is too serious a business to be taken too seriously.

*The Rev Danny Crosby serves Altrincham and Urmston.
Conkers photo by Andrew Dunn via Wikimedia Commons*



Death

Death is an unbearable shock.

It hurts us to the very core of our beings.

It can steal every member of our family or a dear friend at any time it chooses, often without warning.

Sometimes it visits someone whom we only know from a distance, but the news is always received with sadness.

We cannot come to terms with it; we question every aspect of it;

We curse it; get angry with it; cannot hold back the tears; cannot sleep and we doubt we can ever survive the loss and pain it has inflicted upon us.

No-one ever seems to know the right words to say. We hear platitudes; nothing can take away the numbness we feel.

We go over memories time and time again which, in turn, reduce us to tears; we cannot listen to music which we shared with our loved one, and the reasons attached to that mutual sharing of it. It pains our heart too much and the tears flow again.

Why are others going about their daily lives? Why are they laughing?

Don't they know or understand our pain?

We are surrounded by people, so why do we feel so alone and lost?

It is said that 'Time is a great healer' but for us, in this moment, it isn't.

How can it be? This wound has cut too deep and cannot heal.

But, with the passing of time, the process of recovery begins.

It may be short or long. Sadly, for some, it never comes completely, if at all.

Most of us have close family and friends who will catch us, cradle and comfort us when we stumble and fall.

But there are others who don't have such comfort from anywhere. When they fall, they must try and pick themselves up and carry on the best they can.

With the dawning of each day, the rawness of loss begins to ease and the painful memories become easier to recall. Gradually we become stronger and more able to think of the good times and, yes, even the not so good times we shared.

Often we cannot fully explain it or understand it. Perhaps it is the capacity for love that is inside us all that helps us along the path to acceptance; that deep love which gives us strength but which we cannot adequately explain in words. The hand of the Divine, in whatever form it takes for us, that leads us gently back.

— Bernice Lashbrook, a member of Christ Church Unitarian Chapel, Bridgewater.



Photo by Pikul Noorod/Shutterstock.com

Tweeting is not just for the birds

By John Harley

The leaders who run our Youth Programme events passionately believe in the quality of the work we do and the positive impact our weekends have on the lives of children and young people. Over recent years the numbers of youth attending our events have fluctuated alarmingly. I have been increasingly aware that traditional methods of publicising our youth events such as sending out posters in the post to congregations and even emailing parents with information may not be the best way of marketing our events. They also may be ineffective at reaching out to non-Unitarians. So I was delighted when the Nightingale Centre Management Committee offered to host a weekend conference for a group of youth leaders and supporters to come together and share social media tools and approaches which we can use to get our message out to a wider range of people and help boost attendance.

Nine of us – Howard Wilkins, Anna Jarvis, Dani Adair-Stirling, Lizzie Hornby, Jen Hazel, Rob Gretton, Aniuska Dominguez, Julian Smith and I gathered to assess how the Youth Programme publicises events and how we can revolutionise our marketing approaches. A huge thank-you to our participants and their valued input. It seems clear that the wider Unitarian movement needs to embrace social media approaches in parallel to the Youth Programme so that we can get our life-changing faith and values out to the wider community.

– John Harley

Here are reflections from some participants:

New tools for outreach

We, as a group came to a clear understanding of where we are as a Youth Programme nationally and what needs to be done; quite a lot! We feel there is a number of things we can change immediately and a few that will take a bit longer.

On Saturday afternoon Julian Smith visited the group to give a presentation on the wide variety of approaches we can use with social media. He inspired us to use Instagram and get organised with Buffer and other tools that will get our events out there. We watched a short inspiring TED talk presented by Simon Sinek. (See: <http://bit.ly/1oOTUAC>) He makes the powerful point that far more important than *what* we do or *how* we do what we do is *why* we do what we do.

We are now streamlining our social media promotion and interaction so please look for new and exciting messages on Facebook and Twitter.... join us/like us/retweet us!! (See @UnitarianYouth on Twitter and <http://bit.ly/2dG94ov> on Facebook)

– Lizzie Hornby

Using technology to share

One of the key elements I took away from the weekend was how we as leaders in the Youth Programme can use technology to pool and share our resources more. Since we're all leading busy lives in different parts of the country, it can be difficult to involve each other in the work we do together, meaning that we're often preparing our bits in isolation and then frantically working out how to best pool them together in the overall plan. As we began the weekend, one of the first things Howard Wilkins suggested was that we set up a Dropbox for the weekend where we can put all of the notes and documents that we've generated over the weekend. So while it's been very useful this

weekend, it's going to be even *more* useful as we move forward and plan our weekends together whilst still being a great distance from each other. Lizzie Hornby also showed us MailChimp and a plethora of useful apps that can make all of the digital things we do easier and nicer to look at.

We definitely live in a digital world now. Our youth especially live in a digital world. This was a useful weekend for coming up with a plan to engage digitally much more in our future.

– Jen Hazel

Evaluated strengths and weaknesses

On Saturday morning, prior to us diving into social media itself, I ran a session that explored and documented our current process of planning, administering and advertising the Youth Programme events. We then discussed the issues and benefits of the process. Once we were happy with where our strengths and weaknesses are, we began to list common online services and social media platforms that could be used to make the process easier and more effective.

The outcome of the session was a clear structure to work from, such as when to create and update Facebook events, how to generate attention to the events and encourage sharing. We hope that this will result in our popular youth events being booked up further in advance!

The group all agreed that the online booking system on the Unitarian website was a huge hurdle to parents accessing youth events and either a solution or an alternative is required as soon as possible.

– Rob Gretton

Identified opportunities in social media

I arrived at this weekend still quite a stranger in the cyber world – although I am getting a bit more confident with the small efforts I make at church I know I am still very much a novice. Over the course of the weekend it was fascinating listening to people who were using social media on a daily basis both for their work and their social life and I began to understand the opportunities and the power that all these different modes of communication can offer.

Our Youth Programme is a vital part in the continued growth and health of our movement both nationally and locally. Working with others to begin the process of revitalising such a precious community is a real privilege.

– Anna Jarvis

If anyone would like to offer the Youth Programme time or expertise in harnessing social media tools to widen our outreach please contact John at jharley@unitarian.org.uk Happy Tweeting!

– John Harley General Assembly Youth Co-ordinator (and, he says, someone who has never tweeted in his life apart from attracting the attention of a bird.)



John Harley

News in brief

Padiham holds joint service with Sufis

Around 100 people attended a joint Christian-Muslim service of worship on Sunday 23 October at Padiham Unitarian Chapel, Lancashire. The service – titled ‘Uniting for Peace’ – included readings from scripture, prayers for peace, hymn singing and Sufi mystical chanting (in Arabic, Urdu, Farsi and English). Many attenders praised the ‘joyful spirit’ that prevailed.

The service was led by the Rev Jim Corrigan, minister at Padiham and Sufi Muslim leaders Rauf Bashir and Nasser Rasool of the Free Spiritual Centre in Pendle. An inter-faith choir, Singing for the Soul, led congregational singing, while another group combined old Lancastrian shape-note singing (with its Christian roots) with Sufi chanting – in an extraordinary fusion.

In a short sermon, Jim said the joint service came at an important time, with hate crimes on the rise in Britain following the vote in June to leave the European Union, and in the approach to the anniversary of the Paris attacks last November, which killed 130 people and were carried out by people purportedly acting in the name of Islam. Jim said their ideology was in fact a complete distortion ‘of the great faith of Islam’, and it was vital that people of goodwill came together to assert their common humanity.

But there were deeper reasons for the service, Jim said, and he used the development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to show how closely these three monotheistic faiths are interrelated. Above all else, he said, the three faiths espouse love and peace.

In his address, Rauf Bashir of the Free Spiritual Centre made clear that Peace is at the heart of the Muslim faith, the very name



The congregation at Padiham singing one of the hymns at the service. Photo by John Hewerdine

Islam deriving from the word ‘peace’. He made clear Muslims revere the great founders of the Jewish and Christian faiths, including Jesus, Moses and Abraham. Islam, Christianity and Judaism are known as the three great Abrahamic religions.

The service was followed by a shared meal in the halls below the chapel, a meal prepared by members of both communities, with food and conversation flowing freely.

– The Rev Jim Corrigan

How to help all generations feel welcome

On Saturday, 8 October Western Union chapel members gathered for a workshop at Bridport Chapel in the Garden, ‘Encouraging families to Chapel: An intergenerational approach’ led by the Rev John Harley and Lizzie Hornby. There were representatives from the Plymouth, Crewkerne and Bridport congregations.

The day started by assessing where we are in terms of family attendance and where we would ideally like to be as a community. We drew diagrams and cartoons of our situations and worked on putting our ideas into manageable steps and ‘brainstormed’ to help each other move forward. The day included experiencing some intergenerational activities, games and rituals, and covered important topics such as safeguarding, publicity and how to get started from ‘scratch’. We looked at including children in worship, in intergenerational activities outside worship and storytelling, music and games. We had a good look at inspiring resources or intergenerational work such as the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Tapestry of Faith and our home-produced ‘InterGen’. Our main mantra for the day was: whether your congregation presently has no families attending or many families involved you can take simple steps to make your community more welcoming to people of all ages.

One participant said of the day: ‘It was a very useful session and has kick-started me – I feel more likely to implement



Participants in the recent ‘InterGen’ workshop. Photo by Lizzie Hornby

intergenerational approaches than I did. Good to have both your expertise. It was also fun – with a lot packed in.’

Each participant took home a clear plan and ideas for the next six months. We plan to follow up and move forward to the next stage in the spring. We will also consider doing a repeat of this first workshop for other congregations. Please get in touch with Lizzie Hornby to discuss. Email:

events@bridportunitarians.co.uk or ring: 07917 704305

– Lizzie Hornby